



Klein Condemns Venezuelan Anti-Semitism at Congressional Hearing

Washington, D.C. – At today's hearing of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Congressman Ron Klein, (FL-22) the Chairman of the Congressional Taskforce Against Anti-Semitism, condemned the current trends of anti-Israel and anti-Jewish hate being observed in Venezuela. Klein asked the hearing's witnesses to propose solutions for addressing these issues without an U.S. Ambassador currently serving in Venezuela, and also asked for regional strategies to address Venezuelan anti-Semitism.

The full statement follows.

Statement of Congressman Ron Klein (FL-22)
As Prepared For Delivery
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
U.S. Policy toward Latin America in 2009 and Beyond
February 5, 2009

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this important hearing to address the rapidly changing relationship between the United States and Latin America. This is a strategically and culturally significant relationship, and I will continue to urge this administration, as I urged the last one, to be more engaged in the region.

This hearing could not come at a more urgent time. Mr. Chairman, as you know, our relationship with Venezuela is volatile at best, hostile at worst. The Transportation Security Administration at our airports cannot currently guarantee the safety of US passengers traveling back and forth between Caracas and South Florida or any other place in the United States. President Chavez is trying to consolidate his power, even as the price of oil declines, and this week he celebrated 10 years of ruling his country.

Furthermore, it is disturbing and unacceptable for many of us to witness the state's fomenting of anti-Israel and anti-Jewish hate. I have been watching this closely as the Chairman of the Congressional Taskforce Against Anti-Semitism. State-run TV and websites are inciting hatred against Jews, culminating in a vicious attack against a Caracas synagogue, where its administrative offices were defaced with anti-Semitic graffiti. Most ominous in this attack was how the perpetrators stole computer hard drives, thereby obtaining private information and keeping lists of Jews. Jews in Venezuela are frightened. We, here in the United States, want to help.

As you know, Mr. Chavez expelled the US ambassador last year. Without an ambassador in Venezuela, what do you think is the best way to address these issues, both on a broader basis and on the issues of anti-Semitism?

Additionally, how can the US work with other countries in the region to address issues in Venezuela? Who are our best allies to help us, both on the broader diplomatic issues and ensuring the safety of the Venezuelan Jewish community?

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